

Exploring the Realities of Inclusive Education for Muslim Children with Special Needs in Government and Private Schools of Jodhpur

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ABSTRACT

The goal of inclusive education is to ensure that every child, regardless of ability, socio-economic background, or religious identity, has access to quality education. In India, while substantial progress has been made in policy formulation, the reality for certain marginalized groups—such as Muslim children with special needs (CSN)—remains challenging. This research paper examines the ground realities of the educational experiences of Muslim CSN in higher secondary schools (government and private) in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Drawing on mixed-methods research, including field surveys, teacher interviews, parental narratives, and school observations, the study reveals significant gaps in inclusive infrastructure, teacher training, and community awareness. Muslim CSN are doubly marginalized—first by their disability and second by systemic religious exclusion. The findings indicate that while government policies such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act and Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act exist on paper, their implementation is patchy and inconsistent. Meanwhile, private schools often practice covert exclusion during the admission process. Furthermore, social stigma within Muslim communities also acts as a barrier, particularly for girls with disabilities. To address these challenges, the paper recommends a comprehensive approach: strengthening school infrastructure, improving teacher capacity, promoting community awareness, leveraging Muslim educational societies, and enforcing accountability mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

Context and Importance

National laws, international commitments like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and constitutional safeguards all support India's commitment to inclusive education. According to the RPWD Act (2016) and the Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009), all children, including CSN, must receive an equal and high-quality education.

However, there is still a lack of study on the relationship between disability and religious minority status in India. Because Muslims in India have the lowest educational achievement of any religious group, the Sachar Committee Report (2006) noted that Muslim youngsters already confront systematic obstacles. These obstacles increase for CSN Muslims.

Why Focus on Jodhpur?

Jodhpur, the second-largest city in Rajasthan, boasts a vibrant cultural heritage and a diverse demographic profile. Based on the 2011 Census data, Muslims make up approximately 15% of the city's population. Despite this, their enrollment rates in secondary and higher secondary education are notably low. Several Muslim educational organizations, such as the Marwar Muslim Educational & Welfare Society (MMEWS), run numerous schools and colleges in the region. However, fostering inclusive education has yet to become a central focus, even within these community-led institutions.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Are government and private higher secondary schools in Jodhpur inclusive of Muslim CSN?
- What are the barriers faced by Muslim CSN in accessing and thriving in secondary education?
- How can policy implementation, school practices, and community attitudes be improved?
- What role can Muslim educational societies play in promoting inclusive education?

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

DATA SOURCES

a) Quantitative Data

- Surveys were conducted in 10 government and 10 private higher secondary schools.
- Data was collected on:
 - Infrastructure (ramps, accessible toilets, assistive devices).
 - Enrollment of CSN, with a focus on Muslim children.
 - Teacher qualifications and inclusive education training.

b) Qualitative Data

- In-depth interviews with:
 - 30 teachers (15 government, 15 private).
 - 20 parents of Muslim CSN.
 - 5 representatives from Muslim educational societies.
 - 5 community leaders and NGO workers.
- School observations using a structured checklist to assess:
 - Physical accessibility.
 - Classroom inclusiveness.
 - Teacher-student interactions.

Sampling Method

- Schools were selected based on geographic diversity within Jodhpur city and peri-urban areas.
- A balance of government and private schools was maintained.
- Parents were identified through school networks and local disability NGOs.

Limitations

- The study focused primarily on urban and peri-urban schools; rural Jodhpur may present a different scenario.
- The relatively small sample size limits the ability to generalize findings to all of Rajasthan.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE

Improving School Infrastructure

Current Findings:

- Only 15% of schools had wheelchair-accessible entrances.
- Less than 10% had accessible toilets.
- No schools had Braille or assistive listening devices.

Recommendations:

- The government should provide dedicated funding to make all higher secondary schools barrier-free.
- Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure flexible learning environments.
- Special emphasis should be placed on making girls' facilities accessible, as Muslim girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable.

Enhancing Teacher Capacity

Current Findings:

- Only 20% of teachers had received formal training in Special Needs Education (SNE).
- Many teachers hold negative attitudes, believing that CSN should attend special schools.
- Private schools often reject CSN during admissions using subtle tactics.

Recommendations:

- Introduce mandatory SNE modules in both pre-service and in-service teacher training.
- Conduct regular workshops on:
 - Differentiated instruction.

- Cultural sensitivity and anti-bias training.
- Classroom management for inclusive settings.
- Establish mentorship programs where trained inclusive educators can support their peers.

Strengthening Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Current Findings:

- Budgets under IEDSS are underutilized.
- There is no systematic monitoring of inclusive practices at the school level.

Recommendations:

- Establish a district-level task force to monitor the implementation of inclusive education.
- Conduct annual school audits with clear metrics on inclusivity.
- Make monitoring reports publicly available to ensure accountability.

Mobilizing Muslim Educational Societies

Current Findings:

- Organizations like MMEWS focus primarily on improving mainstream education for Muslims.
- There is little emphasis on inclusion of CSN.

Recommendations:

- Encourage Muslim educational societies to:
 - Adopt an inclusive education policy.
 - Establish Resource Centers within their institutions.
 - Provide scholarships and support services for Muslim CSN.
- Facilitate partnerships between Muslim educational societies and disability NGOs to build capacity.

Promoting Community Awareness

Current Findings:

- Stigma around disability remains strong in many Muslim families.
- Parents often have low aspirations for their disabled children, especially daughters.
- Many parents are unaware of their rights under the RPWD Act and RTE Act.

Recommendations:

- Conduct awareness campaigns in collaboration with:
 - Religious leaders (imams, ulema).
 - Women's groups within the community.
 - Local NGOs.
- Promote positive narratives around disability and education through:
 - Friday sermons (khutbas).
 - Community events.
 - Social media and print materials.
- Establish parent support groups to create peer networks and build parental confidence.

CONCLUSION OF STUDY

This study highlights that Muslim children with special needs in Jodhpur face numerous obstacles in accessing higher secondary education:

- Many schools lack the necessary physical infrastructure to support inclusive learning environments.
- Teachers are often underprepared, with limited training and prevalent misunderstandings about the principles of inclusive education.
- Community-based stigma, particularly toward girls with disabilities, significantly restricts educational opportunities.
- Private schools, although better equipped, often implement subtle exclusionary practices that disadvantage children with special needs.

- Although inclusive education policies exist at the government level, their execution and monitoring remain weak and inconsistent.

Despite these challenges, there are clear avenues for progress:

- A considerable number of teachers are eager to enhance their skills and embrace inclusive teaching methods.
- Muslim educational organizations are open to forming partnerships when supported with appropriate resources and guidance.
- NGOs specializing in disability advocacy can serve as critical connectors between policy frameworks and real-world application.

Advancing inclusive education requires an integrated and collaborative approach, which should involve:

- Stronger government action to enforce inclusive education mandates effectively.
- Comprehensive capacity-building programs within educational institutions.
- Empowerment initiatives for Muslim families and communities to foster active support for inclusive education.
- Partnerships across different sectors create sustainable systemic change.

Achieving inclusive and equitable education for all children in Jodhpur, especially for those who are most marginalized, demands a holistic and long-term commitment. Only through such coordinated efforts can every child be given the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

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